

OUT OF THE MOUTH OF BABES

Youth speak out on youthlove



KIDS CLUB ANTHOLOGY #1

What are the Kids Club anthologies?

Sexual attraction to youth, youth sexuality, adult/youth relationships, and the age of consent are all topics - grouped under the word "youthlove" for convenience - which inspire a multitude of emotions and opinions depending on who you talk to. Though not an overwhelming amount, there is still a plethora of intriguing material that has been written on the subject. While more negative and antagonistic analyses of these subjects aren't difficult to come by, positive, neutral, and engaging discourse around the topics are less likely to be found by the average person.

Therefore, this is the first in a series of anthologies which are an attempt by me to put together and distribute a variety of often overlooked viewpoints concerning these subjects. So much information and many opinions about these topics are hard to find, restricted to academics or people lucky enough to be able to visit archives, and spread far across many publications and disciplines.

These collections are by no means exhaustive or definitive; due to my mother tongue, they will unfortunately be Anglocentric and limited almost entirely to pieces originally written in English.

I hope these anthologies can be of use to those attracted to youth, those interested in a fuller range of opinions on these topics, academics and researchers in search of historical documents, and those who wish to further understand the attraction to youth and issues surrounding the age of consent and adult/youth relationships.

It is my sincere hope that these anthologies will contribute to further understanding of these topics and spur discussion of the subjects that go beyond a simple anti or pro view and fully engage with the questions and issues that arise when these conversations occur.

N O C O P Y R I G H T



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Knowledge should be free

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out of the mouths of babes - youth speak out about youthlove -

Despite all of the noise from the anti, pro, and neutral side of youthlove, there is one group whose voice is often forgotten - youth themselves. Whether this is from an ageist assumption that youth don't know what's good for them or the unfortunate reality that youth don't often get a chance to express their view in print media, it represents a glaring omission in most discussions of topics such as youthlove, the age of consent, and adult/youth relationships. A true discussion of these subjects can't be had if only adults are granted a chance to speak.

This anthology collects material from the late 70s to the mid 90s written by gay boys and lesbians, self-proclaimed dykes and fags, feminists, youth liberationists, and groups for queer youth.

Several recurring themes emerge throughout the pieces: ageism both in communities and in legislation, a youth's right to decide for themselves, and the ways in which imbalances of power can be fixed. No matter the subject, one message is clear throughout: "listen to us!"

*** This anthology contains references to and descriptions of both consensual and non-consensual sexual acts**

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A Militant Young Dyke's Feminist Perspective on the Age of Consent Question

Anonymous

This anonymous essay appeared in Gay Youth Community News (vol. 1, no. 5, December 1979/January 1980), a Bay Area-based newspaper published by the National Gay Youth Network. The network, composed of youth groups, student unions, and sponsors, offered state resources and information on how someone could start their own gay youth group. The essay appeared in response to a piece by Lynne Shapiro in the Los Angeles-based, bimonthly feminist lesbian magazine The Lesbian Tide, wherein the author denied age of consent and pederasty as being "gay issues" and spoke against having age of consent reform be part of the demands of the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

In the September/October [1979] issue of *Lesbian Tide* was an article entitled "Women Loving Women Denounce Men 'Loving' Boys."

It was an enraging experience to read this article. For all its outrageousness, though, it seemed familiar.

It was representative of a great population of older Lesbians' perspective of age of consent.

The article was an outline of Lesbian Feminist Liberation's¹ position and rationale for objecting to making the lowering of the age of consent one of the demands for the March on Washington.

Arguments are:

- 1) "Tremendous power differences" between adults and children² make consent doubtful.
- 2) Repeal of the age of consent laws presents great dangers to Young women as 97-99% of "molested children" are girls who are raped and "taken advantage of" by heterosexual men.
- 3) It is outrageous to consider framing laws in terms of male needs when the vast majority of those affected are female.
- 4) It is not a children's rights issue... "just plays into the fantasies adults have about their, our childhoods."
- 5) It is mentioned that: "in developing their position, LFL relied heavily on Florence Rush's research on child molestation..."

To start with, the fact that this position has been developed on the basis of findings of a study on child molestation (which by its title indicates that it is focused on abusive sexual relationships between adults and "children"; or that it began and ended as a project with the assumption that no sexual relationship between a "child" and adult could be consensual and good) indicated tunnel-vision with a passion. Add to that the fact that there was no Young woman's perspective in the process of development of this position.

No dialog with Young women. Voilà, we have an obnoxious insult to Young people. (And for all the patronization for Young women we get a special treat of oppression.)

There is another fundamental problem with the foundation of LFL's position besides misinformed and adult-biased "studying."

It seems to be either unknown or regarded as irrelevant that: 1) Young people can be/are punished for willfully consenting to a sexual relation with an adult; 2) Young people are not allowed (do not have the right) to engage in sexual relationships with each other, either, under present laws protecting us.

But now I'll go on with the arguments against the lowering of the age of consent.

"Power differences between adults and children make consent highly doubtful."

The very same "tremendous power differences" noted in defense of age of consent laws make Real Protection from coercive or exploitative sexual experiences more than doubtful.

In fact, these power differences make for repression of our sexuality from above - so to speak - and exploitation in the dark. (You know some of the most "protective" fathers in this world creep into their daughter's bedroom at night...)

Yes, young people have less power, to be sure, and older people denying Young people's ability to say yes or no are participating in such imbalance by denying us that right.

"Repeal of the age of consent laws presents great dangers to Young women as 97-99% of molested children are girls who are raped and taken advantage of by heterosexual men."

Yes, it may be mostly Young women being raped and abused by heterosexual men. It is also significant to note the popularized fact that it mostly occurs within the family home which emphasizes how "protective" control over Young people is most corrupt where it is most centralized.

Why do older women refuse to see the obvious correlation of Young women having the right to say no in general - not having control over her living situation or her own body - *her* body and her life being her parent's property - and sexual abuse by the possessors?

Consider how a woman is being raped every minute.... consider how millions and millions of women *over 21* are being used and abused as pornography models and as prostitutes... under laws that allow male-female sex....

If age of consent laws are such a valuable, viable "protection" for Young women from sexual abuse - it seems logical too that heterosexual sex between persons of any age be outlawed.

Men should be sent to prison for one to five years and women should be hospitalized in a mental institution indeterminately until they are "rehabilitated" and no longer engage in such self-destructive behavior.

"It is outrageous to consider framing laws in terms of male needs when the vast majority of those affected are female."

This is true. And it is a patriarchal interest to maintain "protective" control over our bodies.

Think about how over half of Young women institutionalized in this country are there for committing a status offense, while 18% of Young men are put away on that basis. About five times as many Young women as Young men are institutionalized for sexual behavior before reaching the age of consent. While as stated above, most adult/youth sexual abuse is perpetrated by men!

With laws the way they are it is important (and intelligent) to look at *who's* getting caught for *what* and *why*!

How many sexually abusing guardians or close family members are being prosecuted and institutionalized?

LFL and company are not thinking with this perspective though.

Actually, it seems their intended meaning was the quintessence of sexist as well as ageist thinking, buying into the idea that boys have sexual feelings and are more able to protect themselves from sexual abuse while girls are more "pure" and defenseless, and are therefore in need of more strong-handed "protection from the arm of the law."

What a scream-worthy "feminist" line!

"It is not a children's rights issue."

I have had fully consensual sexual relationships with women (who happened to be over 21) since the age of 13. I could have been punished. I could have been punished beyond my relationship being destroyed, cut off, taken away... my lovers imprisoned... my being put through a trial and pressured to testify against them... I could have been taken "into custody" by the state. I could have been processed by a juvenile institution (a "home" or "school" or "camp") for an unlimited (until age 18) sentence as a status offender (for being involved in a sexual relationship and/or for being willfully and independently seeing a woman against my guardians' wishes - or for leaving their home).

The only reason it didn't happen is because my guardians either did not know of the relationships, or did not exercise their prerogative to have me put away. *Tell me about how the right to consent isn't a child's rights issue!*

"People genuinely concerned with children's liberation should instead approach their legal oppression in a much broader sense than just changing the age at which they can have sex."

I must agree wholeheartedly that people concerned with children's and Young people's liberation should approach Young people's oppression in a much broader sense than just changing the age at which people can have sex. Yes. Status offenses as a whole should be eliminated. Yes. Young people must gain full First Amendment rights in our homes and schools and communities. Young people must have the right to direct our education. Young people must gain the right to live independently. Yes! Our bodies must become sovereign - not property to be spanked, molested or otherwise used and abused!

And I agree that older men wanting to fight first, foremost, and only for "lowering of the age of consent" are certainly not concerned with Young people's rights - they are concerned with their interest in being sexual with "kids" or "youngsters" or "chickens" (to use their own ageist terminology). *Not our right to make choices.*

It would also be a perfect step for LFL and those agreeing with them to follow that idea of a "broader sense" on their side. Approach our sexual exploitation in a "much broader sense" than attempting to "protect" Young people - Young women - by upholding laws which bar Young people from exercising our choices about our feelings, our bodies, and our relationships.

NOTES

1. LFL is a national group based in New York which lobbies against the demand proposed and lobbied for by both a "Men Loving Boys" group and a member of Gay Youth of New York.

2. "Children" is supposed to denote all people under age 18 (or presumably under legal consenting age in states with a different age of consent.) There are no distinctions made by LFL - or Lynn Shapiro, author of the article - between children 2 years, 6 years, or 16 years of age in all the statements regarding "children."

Fuck the Age of Consent!

Lesbian & Gay Freedom Movement

The Lesbian and Gay Freedom Movement was a radical, anarchist-aligned queer group based in London whose outlook and vocabulary was reminiscent of 70s gay liberation. Their support for youth and youthlovers was explicit, aiming for sexual freedom for all as well as children's liberation and freedom to choose their own sexuality. Two articles from the collective's newsletter are included here - Fuck the Age of Consent! (Winter 1993) and Criminal Justice Act (Spring 1995). It's unknown if the two pieces were penned by the same author, as none of the newsletter's articles specify who wrote them.

Fuck the Age of Consent!

As a queer teenager I'm often expected to support other gay and bisexual men in their quest for an equal age of consent. When I give the 'politically incorrect' stance of not supporting them they seem to have a look of complete disbelief on their faces and often attack me and patronise me as a young child who "just doesn't understand politics." Any age of consent oppresses me, allowing the state to have control over when I'm allowed sex. I wanted sex at 11 and would have taken it had it been offered. As I see it, an age of consent protects nobody. It doesn't stop abuse or give young people (straight or gay) the power to say "no," or report the abuse. All it does is create an aura of fear around sex for the queer under 21 or the straight woman under 16. Once 21 or 16 are reached, it's almost as if we must have sex to be considered normal or just because we've reached the age when we should be consenting. The age of consent doesn't do anything other than oppress, create fear, and allow the state to control our most personal feelings and desires. It's as if they have created the law to make sure we feel ashamed and keep to their morals. It's up to each person whether they have sex at 8 or 12 or 16 or 21 or 89 or never, and there should be information about sex and access to safer sex materials at any age. So whenever they ask me about the age of consent I'll say NO to 21, NO to 18, NO to 16, and NO to the age of consent itself. Abuse can't be stopped by the law, neither can protection be given; but control, guilt and fear can and will occur.

FUCK 21, FUCK 18, FUCK 16, WE SAY FUCK THE AGE OF CONSENT!

Criminal Justice Act

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill¹ having become an Act of Parliament, is having far reaching effects upon the way we demonstrate peacefully and live our lives. As the government tightens its grip of control over our lives people are being arrested as a result of this act.

It is no longer legal for us to have spontaneous or planned demonstrations or actions against State Policy or the rich without police permission. The effect this may have on isolating and dividing dissent against the government may be great. In a country supposedly advocating

free speech so many voices and ways of expressing anger peacefully have been silenced and stopped.

Certain groups such as ravers and squatters, travelers and hunt sabs² have been forced into illegality in order to follow their lifestyles or carry out their beliefs. The hypocrisy of the State tries to create anti-discrimination legislation for some groups yet chooses others to be hounded out of society and used as scapegoats for their own policies which cause violence and poverty.

The State makes grudging concessions to gays and lesbians by reducing the legal age for gay sex from 21 to 18 and decriminalising homosexuality for both sexes in the armed forces, but at the same time reduces the rights of squatters, travelers, ravers and those who wish to protest. The State hopes to divide up anger against the system by rewarding some who conform and punishing those who disobey and want to change.

As a young faggot I'm meant to be proud of the age of consent reduction from 21 to 18 for us men loving men contained within the Act. I'm meant to rejoice at the kindness and tolerance of the State in allowing me to follow my perversion. Well all I feel is sick in the gut that so many gays sold out to the State. It was more important to get permission from the state to love and fuck their own sex than to stick with everyone like squatters, travelers and so on who lost what security they had when this became an act. The only permission I need for having sex is my own. No-one has the right to decide when, how or who I fuck. As long as we both consent it's none of their business. The State is assimilating queers the same way it turned punk, the politics and lifestyles, into punk - the fashion-accessory. For many queers who advocate marriage rights, army rights, church rights and so on the mental assimilation is almost complete. For queers, bisexuals, dykes, gender traitors, boy-lovers, S&Mers, girl-lovers, non-conforming hetties, homos, faggots, sexual mutants, drags, femmes, butches and so on the assimilation will never start until society has changed from its oppressive, unequal form to an all-embracing, all equal, all loving, all fun, diverse society. For me in my room the fight to change society will carry on, the fight to get rid of the State won't stop.

I'm not going to be a gay sell-out. For the squatters who can now have violence used against them in evictions, the travelers whose whole way of life is under threat, the ravers who shall be punished for not following the State guidelines for fun, the fight will not be over. Until everyone can live their lives without laws confining them the fight will not be over. The Criminal Justice Act is one piece in the framework of the State's way of control and oppression of us all. Oppose the Act, change society and have fun!!

NOTES

1. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill of 1994 introduced a number of changes to existing legislation and was especially focused on, as Part IV of the bill called it, "collective trespass or nuisance on land" - essentially, as the article mentions, ravers, travelers, squatters, and campers. The bill also reduced the age of consent for homosexual acts from 21 to 18 years of age - still 2 years older than the heterosexual age of consent of 16.

2. "Hunt sab" is short for "hunt sabotage," in which animal rights activists take direct action to interfere with hunting activities.

42 & 13 - Our Love is Real

Anonymous

This piece is a letter printed in the January/February 1986 issue of Lesbian Connection, a bimonthly newsletter created by the Ambitious Amazons collective in Lansing, Michigan. The newsletter's first issue declares it to be "A National Lesbian Forum - News & Ideas For, By & About Lesbians," and it has fulfilled its mission from 1979 to today. Along with the original letter, this collection includes response letters published in later issues.

I am a 13-year-old originally from Lima, Peru. I went to a Catholic school there and fell in love with one of the nuns, Anne, my English teacher. At the time I was involved with a girl my own age and I was very scared because the school did not approve of gays. I used to confide all my problems to Anne, and she was always so sweet and sympathetic. She was the only one who understood. When she told us that she was going back to the United States and leaving the religious order, I cried for weeks and weeks. Later, I found out that she had been accused of being a bad influence on us and had been sent back to the US.

We kept in touch by letter. Then, because I was at the top of my class, I got to come to the States on an exchange students program. After living with an American family for three months I moved in with Anne, against the family's wishes. She is 42 years old and we are now lovers. We have some problems, because people are mean and do not approve. Everyone that we know says it will not work, but I am so happy and I love her very much. She works at a women's center as a counselor for battered women and she is afraid of losing her job if anybody finds out. I am in high school now and learning English. I love this country. People are more understanding. Some of them. Anne used to be very active in Dignity, an organization for Catholic Gays, but some of the women there who knew about us gave us a lot of trouble. One of them called her sick and said that she would get in trouble with the law. I was approached several times to see if I needed help. They don't understand that I am the one who wants to live my life with Anne. So we have just a few dear friends who do not care about our age difference.

I want to tell you there is nothing wrong with her or me. I am not looking for a mother, nor I am replacing my mother with her, like someone said to me. We have a commitment to each other. We have a full sex life which is very satisfying for both of us. People don't understand that young people have sexual feelings too (I am usually the aggressive one). I have learned to be careful and discreet with certain people. We know of one other similar couple (they are 15 and 29), and we visit them. And we are most happy when we are together. I do also have friends my own age, and I participate in school activities (next year I will be a cheerleader). I only know that I have never been so happy in my life and I don't want it to ever change. The only reason I am writing is to let you know that there truly are more girls like me, who are not ashamed or confused about our sexuality. I only wish that more people would take us seriously. Some of us are happy the way we are, and we will grow up to be responsible adults because of the love and understanding we get from grown-up people.

--BellAire, TX

Two letters in reply, one negative and one a bit more positive, were printed in the following March/April, 1986 issue.

I just read the article "42 & 13 - OUR LOVE IS REAL" (vol. 8/issue 4) and was incensed. It is women of this ilk that give Lesbians a bad name. For a 42-year-old woman to molest a child of 13 is simply incomprehensible. It staggers the mind. If the relationship is truly based on love, Anne, being the "adult", should let the child grow up, unmolested, and pursue a relationship of "love" outside of the bedroom until the 13-year-old is more capable of making the choice as an adult. I feel the 13-year-old should see a good counselor, and Anne should go to jail for molesting a child and see a psychiatrist for her pedophilic behavior.

--Hurleyville, NY

Having just read the article "42 & 13 - OUR LOVE IS REAL," I can imagine the kind of condemnation Anne will receive in your next issues. I'm sure she will be called everything from a pedophile to a pervert, but perhaps Anne and her young friend would best be served by a little understanding and compassion. I certainly believe that both parties in this relationship would have been better off if they had waited a few years before consummating this union. Sometimes, however, human beings are caught up in situations governed by such emotional intensity that they do not always do what is best or even rational. One would hope that Anne, being the adult in the situation, would step back and reevaluate it. If she and the 13-year-old still feel the same way in a few years, when the 13-year-old has had a chance to grow and really make choices, then their love will have obviously stood the most important test of all - time.

--A Fellow Frail Human Being

Even more responses - to both the original story and the letters in the next issue - poured in and were printed in the July/August, 1986 issue.

I just could not believe my eyes when I read the response to "42 & 13 - OUR LOVE IS REAL" (vol. 8/issue 5 Responses). I do think young people have a right to make choices about their intimate relationships. If this society has succeeded in keeping most of them helpless and "not able to make their own choices," this certainly does not mean that lesbians should also deny the right to control own's own life to a young woman who has - thank Goddess - managed to escape the restrictions the rest of us are taking for granted. Are we taking inequality so much for granted, too, that the only relationship we can imagine between a 13-year-old and a 42-year-old is the power of the latter over the former?

Whatever the practical problems these women are facing, please do not add to them by declaring one of them in need of protection because of her "immaturity" and threatening the other with the classical punishment tools of our patriarchal society: prison and psychiatry.

Dear "42 & 13": your lives won't always be easy but don't let anyone break your spirit.

--32 and Not Yet Adult, Helsinki, FINLAND

I was hoping for much more compassion for the "42 & 13 - OUR LOVE IS REAL" author. When will we ever understand that love and maturity are a state of mind, not necessarily related to chronological age? So what if she is 13? Who is to say she isn't mature, and capable of making choices about her own life? Who is to say she isn't mature, and capable of making choices about her own life? I have known several women who have dated 16-year-old girls, and they bedded them down as well. I don't know about your community, but this is not uncommon in mine. It is tacitly accepted, but everyone pretends it isn't happening for fear of being called child molesters. Let's be honest. Let's understand this isn't a plot to gain converts. Let's understand we are talking about women, not men.

Let's say what it is - love. I say let's applaud the 13-year-old for knowing her lesbianism at such an early age. I say let's embrace them in the love they have for each other.

--San Antonio, TX

In response to the girl who wrote about her LOVE FOR AN OLDER WOMAN, I would like to add something. I was 16 when I first came out sexually. The woman I got involved with was 38 and my best friend's mother. At the time I didn't feel age had anything to do with our love, but it did. As our affair continued (it lasted 3 months), we came across a lot of prejudices. In public places people mistook us for mother and daughter and that hurt. My mother questioned our relationship, saying it was unnatural for anyone my age to even be friends with a woman her age. The relationship ended after a lot of arguments (in which she sometimes referred to me as a child). It hurt so badly, I felt my world crumble around me and I cried a lot. The positive side was it was my first learning experience sexually and that was OK. But I would not want what we went through to ever happen to me again. This was 14 years ago. Now that I'm older, I won't get involved with anyone younger because of my experience. But it's really up to you. This is not a letter to tell you what to do. I just wanted you to know what I went through.

--Pittsburgh, PA

I too, must say I was appalled at the 13/42 RELATIONSHIP. I do understand that the 13-year-old feels adult, but any adult knows 13 is still part of childhood. They are not to be blamed or censured for what they feel, but to be protected by responsible adults. This is child abuse, pure and simple.

--Seattle, WA

To 13 AND 42 - Don't let either the outraged ones or the condescending ones get you down. You know what's best for you. If you stay together, more power to you, and if you don't, neither do most couples, regardless of age. It's wonderful for womyn who can love each other to find each other, at any points in their stays on this planet.

-- San Francisco, CA

The responses to "42 & 13 - OUR LOVE IS REAL" were so degrading and ageist. Thirteen-year-old women are smart, sensual, and capable of making decisions in their lives. Obviously, these two women have a lot to share - now. I bless your courage and give you support to endure ridicule from every direction. It is easy to be drawn to young women and it is easy to be drawn to older women. Young lesbians are extremely isolated because of taboo. I am tired of taboo and am alive to break them. When two women come together, it is for a purpose. We as womonalties can't see the reasons sometimes, but they are there. Let's not be judgmental. 42 & 13, your love is beautiful, I'm glad you have found each other, you've probably been loving each other for centuries. Wish I'd come out at 13 instead of 19.

--Annie Ocean, 36, Rainbow's End, OR

Seeking Emancipation in San Francisco

Jes Harrison

Jes Harrison (age 16) gave this speech at the "Man/Boy Love and Sexual Liberation" panel held during a North American Man/Boy Love conference at the Pride Center in San Francisco on October 7, 1984. He tells of how he is seeking legal emancipation from his mother and abusive stepfather, and had to go to San Francisco to find a social worker who believed that he was abused at home and not "molested" by his 19 year old lover. Also present at the conference was Mattachine Society founder Harry Hay, journalist and International Gay and Lesbian Archives founder Jim Kepner, and early gay rights activist Morris Kight.

On June 1st I met a 19 year old student at the JC (junior college) and we started going out and everything and my parents found out and they didn't approve of it. And before this I used to bring him over before they found out he was gay, and they just loved him, they thought he was the greatest guy in the world. The second they found out, they just got totally hostile and they just went the whole nine yards to [accuse him of] child molesting, you know, put him in jail.

My mother approved of it at first, my stepfather didn't. The first thing she said one day when I came up the front steps, she said, "Dad knows, now." Then he drove up and then the interrogation began: you know, hitting me, threatening me and stuff to say everything that had happened. So I was scared, I was very naive at the time. They were telling me things like if I didn't tell them everything, they were going to put me in an insane asylum and stuff like that, just really off the wall stuff. And I'm from Santa Rosa, I don't know any of this! And so, I believed it all, I'm crying and I tell them everything. And then, I had no idea it was going to the police. So then I get in the car and we go down to the-- It was just exactly like you see in the movies: a dark room, the lamp, interrogation. I was in there for about two and a half hours, a taped interview, and me telling them all what happened.

And then my lover, Paul, my mom got on the phone to him and totally just told him never to call again, you know, and all this stuff, and told him that he was sick in the head and needed psychiatric help. And then the next day at work, I contacted my lover and from that point on, we just did everything we could to keep him out of jail and we had both quite good reputations at school with everything so we had to keep those reputations up. And then the only other thing I could do was to come down here to San Francisco and get emancipated to keep him out of jail and keep both our reputations up. And that's basically my present situation: I'm trying to be emancipated. And it isn't the easiest thing in the world!

I thought it was against the law to be gay! I thought you could be thrown in jail for being gay! I was lucky in Santa Rosa to see a gay person on the street. I just got all excited, "Oh, wow, maybe I can pick him up!" Two gay people - I was in heaven! Kids do have some kind of power, but I knew nothing of it. I was being bombarded with bullshit! The things they were telling me, "You can't do this, we're going to do this to you, and you're going to say this and you can't do nothing about it!" Maybe there's some kind of pamphlet they can send out to everybody explaining their rights.

Children and Sex - A View From the Staff

Youth Liberation

Youth Liberation was an organization based in Ann Arbor, Michigan run directly by youth which served as the hub for youth liberation information and organization around the United States. This piece appeared in the April/June 1978 issue of FPS, which had several articles centering on the subject of children and sexuality. FPS (later subtitled The Magazine of Young People's Liberation) was the successor of CHIPS (Cooperative High school Independent Press Service), which provided articles and graphics for (official and underground) school papers and youth in general. FPS continued to provide the same services as CHIPS and expanded to include original contributions and bibliographic resources.

Most people, it seems, find it abhorrent to associate children and sex. If the subject is forced into their consciousness through reading a newspaper article or watching **60 Minutes** they are apt to get a distortion: images of children in bondage, or being kidnapped from happy midwestern homes and sold on the streetcorners of New York.

Depending on one's tastes, politics, sexuality, upbringing and commitment to the liberation of young people, the meaning and significance of those articles and TV shows can vary wildly. Many people on the far right, as well as some on the left, are extremely puritanical and suggest that children and sex should be kept as far apart as possible. Others may favor childhood sex, yet be disgusted by child/adult sex. Still others may feel that child/adult sex could be acceptable, but that child pornography is the ultimate exploitation of young people.

We present our views here because the question of children and sex is rarely discussed from the perspective of the rights of the young people themselves.

There are three major areas we will consider: prostitution, pornography and sex. We would prefer not to have to address prostitution and pornography at all, but since they are in the forefront of the media barrage and are quite popular in this society we can't ignore them. At first we were hesitant to write this article, because it touches on very sensitive points, yet it cannot possibly be long enough to thoroughly explain the reasoning behind our position. We therefore ask the reader to do some serious thinking on this subject herself before accepting or rejecting our position.

SEX BETWEEN OLD AND YOUNG

Youth Liberation believes that children should have the right to control their bodies. We are immediately suspicious of anyone who claims to protect children by restricting their rights (including their 'right' to be a prostitute or to have sex with an adult). Generally, neither children nor any other oppressed group is truly helped by such protection.

One peril that young people certainly don't need to be protected from is sexual experience with other young people. We support the right of young people to engage in sex with other young people. In fact, we encourage it. We know of no evidence that child sex is dangerous or harmful, and we feel there is ample research which shows that children enjoy sex and participate in it fully and freely unless repressed by adults.

We also feel that there is nothing inherently wrong with sexual relationships between adults and young people. Again, we don't know of any valid evidence that consensual sex

between adults and teenagers, or sex play between adults and very young children, is harmful. Our own experience, knowledge, and intuition suggest that sex between adults and children is enjoyable and can be helpful for later sexual development. The major problem, as Kinsey discovered about 30 years ago, is not the fact that sex takes place, but the reaction of the community, laying on its "old tired ethics."

Alfred Kinsey was America's most important sex researcher - personally interviewing thousands of people about their sexual experiences during his career. He did some research on adult/child sex which he conducted by interviewing adults who had sex with children and young people who had been involved with adults. He concluded:

"It is difficult to understand why a child, except for its cultural conditioning, should be disturbed at seeing the genitalia of other persons, or disturbed at having its genitalia touched, or disturbed at even more specific sexual contacts... Some of the more experienced students of juvenile problems have come to believe that the emotional reactions of parents, police officers, and other adults who discover that the child has had such a contact, may disturb the child more seriously than the sexual contacts themselves."¹

Many people have serious reservations about consent in relationships between adults and young people. Consent is important in all sexual relationships and when it doesn't exist the possibility of exploitation immediately arises. Can a young person, or a teenager, give knowledgeable consent to sex? Many adults think not. But our experience has shown us that teenagers and even very young people are much more capable of making their needs and wishes known, and enforcing them, than adults give them credit for. Consent would obviously be difficult to determine from children who can't talk, but we see no point in actively discouraging sex with or among them. Abusers will act in spite of law or society's concern for the welfare of children. The only effective way to avoid abuse is to educate adults to be sensitive to the needs and desires of children and lessen the general level of sexual repression in the society. Current morality more often inhibits people who would be good with children rather than the abusers.

There is another aspect of the consent question, one which is a classic example of ageism in action.

An unspoken belief held by many who argue that young people can't give consent is that young people aren't sexual, and therefore could not give consent even if they wanted to. However, studies of other societies shows quite the opposite. In many societies pre-adolescents are allowed to engage in sex and to observe sexual behavior in adults. Kinsey found that children were capable of reaching multiple orgasms, and that males actually reach their sexual peak during their teen years.

Anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski reported that the children of the Trobiand Islands of Oceania participated in erotic games at age 4, and were enjoying regular sexual intercourse at about age ten.² Similar data has been gathered for other regions of the world. Anthropologist Richard Currier writes: "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that - given the opportunity - children will develop their sexual skills along with all the other social skills that will be needed in adult life."³

Unfortunately, there is always potential for abuse in adult/child relationships, just as there is in all sexual relationships. Rape by fathers of daughters is probably the most common form of child sexual abuse. Rape and all other non-consensual sex should fall under child abuse laws, but the mere fact of sex between children and adults should not be considered abuse. Furthermore, the definition of child sexual abuse should closely parallel that for adults. Wives should have as much right to be protected from sexual abuse from men as do children (and it is a fact that almost all sexual abuse is perpetrated by men).

PROSTITUTION

The question of child prostitution presents many questions, the most important of which is what opinion should one have of prostitution in general? We feel that prostitutes provide a service that is important and valuable in this society. We hope that won't always be the case, but since it is now, prostitution is work that should be respected, legal, well-paid and free from danger. It is as valid as modeling or professional sports or other jobs where one sells one's body. But should young people have equal access to the profession of prostitution?

Youth Liberation feels they should, just as we feel young people should have the right to work at Ford or in coal mines or in other exploitative jobs. Many jobs in this society are based on exploitation, but to deny young people the right to participate in them is to deny them the right to participate in society itself. If one ignores the moralistic arguments about prostitution, it's not that much different from any other job, though prostitutes often have more control over their immediate work situation than do other workers.

It is precisely on this point that the idea of young people's liberation takes on its most important significance. Youth Liberation is not and cannot be seen solely as a movement to integrate young people equally into American society, because many aspects of American society are oppressive. We feel that denying young people the right to participate fully in this society protects them from very little - basically the same conditions that adults must function under every day. And it denies them the knowledge and experience necessary to change the society.

Denying young people the 'right' to be prostitutes or to engage in other forms of work is phony protection - it denies young people experience and income that is probably no more harmful or helpful to them than it is for adults engaged in similar professions. The only way to wipe out juvenile prostitution is to wipe out prostitution altogether, and the only way to do that is to eliminate the two pillars of prostitution, capitalism and sexual repression.

A full page ad which recently appeared in the **Metropolitan News**, a Minneapolis sex tabloid, illustrates the ageism involved in preventing juvenile prostitution:

"If you are a prostitute, refuse to work with juveniles. Do not introduce her to customers of yours. If she is a runaway, **attempt to contact her parents** to inform them of her whereabouts...

"If you are a pimp, respect yourself enough to deal with women, not children. Pimps who turn out **weak-minded, unhappy, and confused school girls**, do so because they aren't man enough to handle women. If you have associates who traffic in juveniles, let them feel your disapproval..." (emphasis added)

Primo Times, an alternative paper from the mid-west, showed more insight in an editorial explaining why they weren't terrified of child prostitution and pornography:

"We do not advocate the exploitation of children; if we did then we'd stop messing around with this magazine and invest in one of those Hong Kong clothing factories where kids work ten hours a day for \$1.00 an hour."

On the other hand, we feel that many young women who become prostitutes don't do it because they want to, but because there are no other decent paying jobs available, especially if they are runaways. The problem here is not so much that young women are becoming prostitutes - it's that this society has so little respect for the young that it provides no decent jobs or alternatives for oppressive home situations. The prostitution problem can only be solved by providing young people with concrete alternatives and this society seems unwilling to do that.

Finally, we feel that prostitutes, young and old, should have a right to at least the same working conditions as other workers. We are opposed to pimps and parlor owners controlling prostitutes through physical force, drug dependency and the like as we are to

the State denying young people equal rights. Prostitution should be decriminalized for minors and adults as a first step, and we should all work for social changes that will minimize the need for prostitution at all.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Should child pornography be outlawed? Should children be denied the 'right' to be photographed and filmed for erotica? Everyone has read in the media that children are forced to partake in such sessions, that parents sometimes 'sell' their children to porn producers, that children are forced to engage in conduct that is utterly repulsive to them. Well, whenever those conditions exist, we feel they should be considered child abuse and should be illegal.

But does that mean that young people who are photographed quite willingly (as boys often are for gay men's magazines, for example) should be prohibited from making money for that? Or that movies such as **Pretty Baby** should be banned? We don't think so, because taking nude photographs of children doesn't necessarily involve force or evil. The best way to regulate the production and sale of child pornography is to work to end the sexual repression that makes such items profitable.

There are several other reasons to argue for the right of children to participate in sex, and for allowing the distribution of child pornography. One is that history has shown that when there are restrictions placed on the First Amendment it is often political and educational materials that end up getting banned, not pornography. In a more progressive society perhaps it would be possible to ban materials that were abusive to women and children (as pornography usually is) without endangering other freedoms. But in the U.S. at this time it is not.

For example, in 1977 New York State passed a law which prohibits all books with sexually explicit photographs of children. The excellent sex education book **Show Me!** is now illegal there. The publisher, along with the Association of American Publishers, the American Booksellers Association and the Freedom to Read Foundation is now challenging the law. They received a favorable decision in District court, but the State is appealing.

A related reason to defend the right of a mingling between children and sex is to confront head-on the section of the right wing represented by people like Anita Bryant⁴. The right wing is mounting an attack on the few positive aspects and trends in American culture. If they open a crack they may unleash a flood of regressive laws against homosexuality, lesbianism, non-marital sex, teenage sex and who knows what else. Sexual repression is a political tool of the right and we must vigorously defend the right of young people to be winners rather than pawns in that struggle.

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Finally, we must contrast our limited view of present conditions with how we think things **should** be. In rational society, sex would be celebrated, not repressed. Sex among children, sex between children and adults and sex in general would be judged by how it made people feel, not by puritanical moral standards.

Richard Currier, in an article in **Human Behavior** magazine, suggests that the explosion in child pornography, child prostitution and interest in sex is evidence that American children can no longer be insulated from the changes in sexual mores.

He says that "...Western society has undergone a revolution in sexual values, but has tried to apply it exclusively to adults... How do we explain to our kids that while sex is natural, healthy, normal and good, they should refrain from enjoying it until they grow up and leave home?"⁵

Hopefully fewer and fewer parents are dishing out that line, and even if they are young people don't seem to be paying very close attention. But we are still a long way from

a society where sexual relationships aren't surrounded with repression and misinformation, where sex will be a creative, enjoyable and less mysterious part of life. Sexual relationships are fantastically diverse and someday we will be able to celebrate that diversity rather than distorting it and hawking it on street corners and in dimly lit bookstores.

It is unfortunate that we have to fight some of the battles for children's freedom on the territory of prostitution and pornography. But if we don't fight there we may lose the war.

NOTES

1. Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1953)
2. Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1929)
3. Richard Currier, "Juvenile Sexuality in Global Perspective," republished in L.L. Constantine and Floyd Martinson, eds., *Children and Sex* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981)
4. Anita Bryant was an American singer turned anti-gay activist who led the 1977 Save the Children campaign in Dade County, Florida in an attempt to repeal a sexual orientation anti-discrimination ordinance.
5. Richard Currier, 1981.

Loving Men

Mark Moffett

This originally untitled interview between gay teen Mark Moffett (15 at the time) and theorist Sylvere Lotringer first appeared in Loving Boys, part of the Semiotext(e) Special Intervention Series 2, in the summer of 1980. Mark Moffett was a part of both the gay youth and youthlover scene, being an active member and spokesperson of Gay Youth of New York and serving on the steering committee of the North American Man/Boy Love Association.

Sylvere Lotringer: What role has man love played in your life?

Mark Moffett: A very important role. The first time I ever began to express sexual feelings toward anyone was within a man/boy relationship. Man love is also something which has helped thousands of boys discover their own sexuality and get in touch with what they really feel. A lot of people think of "man/boy love" as just man/boy sex - a man's lust for a boy. They don't believe that between them there can be love, or the possibility of it. They are wrong.

Lotringer: Sex is only one aspect of it?

Moffett: Yes, although in some circumstances sex is the only aspect.

Lotringer: Do you think there are men who actually abuse children sexually?

Moffett: Of course. Between man and boy there can always be sexual abuses, rape, coercion.

Lotringer: Always on the part of men?

Moffett: It's a little hard for a boy to rape a man (he chuckles). He is out-powered.

Lotringer: Precisely. People fear boys are out-powered anyway.

Moffett: Actually, it's often not the man who goes out to seduce the boy, but the other way around. In my first experience, I did the seducing.

Lotringer: Have you ever been abused?

Moffett: Perhaps once, although I really can't say that I was coerced into it. I was coming home from school and I met this guy. He had this incredibly large cock and I said, "Don't fuck me because I've only been

fucked once before." I didn't want to be fucked, but he did it anyway. But I don't know how you'd call it since it wasn't me being dragged on to his house. I invited him over to mine...

Lotringer: Do you think this is exceptional in any way?

Moffett: No. It is mostly the boys who go out in search of sexual satisfaction from men. Of course the men are willing to get it, and they can find boys anyway. But where are they going to find these certain boys who need them and want to have sex with them? They just can't go to a school park or something. It's easier for boys to find out where gay men would be hanging out.

Lotringer: Do you think boys realize that it is harder for men to find boys, that men may be afraid to approach them because of the law?

Moffett: Oh, yes, I've encountered that. Lots of times. As soon as they found out how old I was they tried to get rid of me. Some of them had careers and family to worry about.

Lotringer: How long have you been involved in these encounters?

Moffett: Since I was 13.

Lotringer: That was two years ago.

Moffett: Yes.

Lotringer: How did it all start?

Moffett: One day I was doing the laundry and there was an ad on the bulletin board for a gay dance and it said: "For further information call Frank." So I memorized his number and called him up. I asked him if he was gay. He said yes. I said: "Do you

want to have sex?"

Lotringer: Had you had sex before?

Moffett: Before that I had sexual explorations with friends my own age. But I didn't consider that I lost my virginity then. When I had sex with that man was really first having sex.

Lotringer: What if he hadn't been gay?

Moffett: I would have hung up.

Lotringer: You're not interested in straight men?

Moffett: I'm interested in whomever I'm attracted to. Mainly they're gay. I find some straight men attractive, but they wouldn't want to have sex with me. At least I doubt it. So the men I do have sex with are gay.

Lotringer: Do you consider yourself gay?

Moffett: Yes.

Lotringer: Boys have to be gay to be interested in men?

Moffett: I'm sure lots of them term themselves bi, or just don't term themselves anything.

Lotringer: Would most boys use your direct approach to men?

Moffett: I don't think so. Boys I know have a lot of sexual hang-ups. They are embarrassed to talk about it. They wouldn't approach a man directly. I don't know why I did it myself. Maybe I was just desperate.

Lotringer: You can be desperate for sex at 13?

Moffett: Oh yes.

Lotringer: Few people would believe that.

Moffett: It seems that adults, or parents, always keep this discovery of sex from their children. I don't know where that originated.

Lotringer: Did you feel you were prevented from discovering sex?

Moffett: No. We never discussed sex in my home. So I was impartial (is that the word?) to the whole idea of sex really. I didn't think it was bad to talk about it because it was never talked about.

Lotringer: There isn't just home. There is also school.

Moffett: We had sex education.

Lotringer: How old were you when you had sex education?

Moffett: Not until I was 12.

Lotringer: Was it a good thing to have?

Moffett: That late! But it was a good thing to have anyway. It was basic stuff, like the parts, the organs of the body, how they operate. They should have gone into more details.

Lotringer: Did you learn anything?

Moffett: I learned about heterosexual sex, of course not about homosexual sex.

Lotringer: Did they talk about it in class?

Moffett: Not that I can recall. Not the teacher anyway. The students may have made some remarks.

Lotringer: What should you have been taught?

Moffett: The basics. Not the basics of learning about organs and how they operate, but the basics of accepting sex as good. It should start when children want to experiment, whenever they start touching themselves or wanting to breastfeed off their mothers. I can remember being three years old and saying to this friend of mine, I'll show you what I got if you show me what you got. I was told that it was dirty, that it shouldn't be done. There was nothing wrong with it. Things like that should be allowed between kids. They should be made aware of how children are born and alternate ways of doing that too as soon as they enter school.

Lotringer: Where else did you learn about sex?

Moffett: When I moved from living with my mother to my father, he was much more open. He used to let me look at his pornography magazines. I began to feel that it wasn't a bad thing to talk about sex and to learn how people did things.

Lotringer: Have you ever had any relationships with girls?

Moffett: I've had friendships with girls, but no sexual relationships.

Lotringer: You never felt attracted?

Moffett: No. I never had the desire.

Lotringer: What was your reaction to the pictures in straight porno magazines?

Moffett: I didn't look at them. I just read the stories.

Lotringer: Is your father very open on this subject?

Moffett: No. He didn't want to discuss it himself. I think he would have been very uptight about it.

Lotringer: Is your father aware of what you feel and what you do?

Moffett: Yes.

Lotringer: For how long has he been?

Moffett: I came out to him in December of 1978 and so he knew I was gay. When I was in NAMBLA (North American Man/Boy Love Association) he somehow found out about it. Oh yes, I was on a news show talking about my relationships with older men so he naturally assumed I was doing that.

Lotringer: Did you ever talk to him about it?

Moffett: Not directly. I never discussed what he feels about man/boy love.

Lotringer: Did he ask you anything after the news show?

Moffett: Not that I can recall. He was only questioning the organization. He knows how I feel about the issue. He read past speeches I made on behalf of Gay Youth of New York about the age of consent.

Lotringer: What do you think about the age of consent?

Moffett: I was made aware of this issue a year and a half ago and had never really formed an opinion on it. Now I think the age of consent should be lowered and probably abolished. But only after coercion laws have been strengthened and there's been adequate education of pre-pubescent children. As it stands now, a lot of kids would be in danger since they don't know much about sex and sexual relationships. If they start having sexual relationships very young in life, by the time they're 9 or 10 they are going to know if something wrong is happening. It all comes back to education. After that children can be expected and given the freedom to have sex with whomever they want to have sex with.

Lotringer: Do you think our society plays the politics of the ostrich and buries its head instead of giving children the proper tools to handle sexual situations?

Moffett: They don't want to confront it. They think that laws and threats of prison and death are going to solve the problem.

Instead of trying to work the other way around, from the children's side and try to educate them, all they think of is putting away people who want to have sex with children. I don't think rape is being stopped now with the age of consent laws.

Lotringer: To educate children would be assuming that they can be responsible for their own lives. If you are given the tools to choose, it means you have a right to choose in sexual matters, and quite a few others. I'm not sure our society is ready for that.

Moffett: Children will be able to make their own decisions if they are forced to make them. As it is now, all the decision-making is done for them, so they're not used to doing it. When I first started making independent decisions on my own, it was very difficult because I didn't know how to go about it. But if children start much younger to decide if they want to go out with a friend of theirs, play doctor or undress, they will be more relaxed with making decisions, and be better at it. No one seems to believe that before 18 a person is capable of making an intelligent decision. No one under the age of 18 is even valued in his opinion on anything. In my school we're treated like stupid little nothings who can't do anything for themselves. And yet each year we go higher in grade and we're told, Oh, you're smarter, you've got to do more on your own this year - and it's just the opposite. They take more freedom away from us because they want to have their own power trips, and the only place they can do it is in a school where they won't be threatened, or at least don't feel threatened, or don't seem to be threatened by us in school. We can't do anything. It's a private school and we chose to go there.

I remember thinking once, Oh when I'm an adult, then I'll have a sex life. It shouldn't be the way it is. I wanted one *then*. I shouldn't have had to wait as long as I did. I had to sneak around and do it secretly, which I shouldn't have had to do.

Lotringer: When did you first realize that you were gay?

Moffett: A week after I turned 13.

Lotringer: Was that the consequence, or the

conclusion of other events?

Moffett: It just happened. I even forget where I was. I just thought I am gay, that's all.

Lotringer: Do you know that 13 is a symbolic number? It's a time of initiation in many Western religions, a rite of passage. The child is given a place and responsibility in the community.

Moffett: I never thought of that.

Lotringer: So it's coincidental that your realization corresponded to your 13th birthday.

Moffett: Perhaps. Plus I had just moved to New York so I was exposed to gays for the first time. I mean in Tennessee and Virginia people are not openly gay. Being in a city where people were *obviously* gay, it was a lot easier for me to recognize that I am gay. I had realized it but - this is the strange part - never said it to myself.

Lotringer: When did you move to New York?

Moffett: January 1, 1978.

Lotringer: How old were you?

Moffett: I was 12.

Lotringer: When did you first feel attracted toward men?

Moffett: When I was 10. I didn't think bad thoughts about it either. I just accepted it because I really had no bad views of sex. I didn't think that sex was dirty. Plus we had never discussed homosexuality. I had never been told, except once, that it was sick.

Lotringer: How did this happen?

Moffett: I remember once using the word *queer*. My mother told me what it was. She said it was men who loved one another, and it was sick. It was the only comment I ever heard about homosexuality.

Lotringer: What specifically attracted you to men - was it that they had more experience, or a social position?

Moffett: It was the physical attraction. Before I was a teenager I was attracted to men with hairy chests, it was for that and no other reason. Then I was attracted to more parts of their bodies. Then I was just attracted to men. That's what started it: physical attraction. I didn't want them because they had more experience, although when it came down to it, that helped a lot.

Lotringer: Do you think some form of equality can be established between a man and a boy?

Moffett: It is possible, although I don't know how often that happens. There really isn't an equality, except in that the boy wants something the man has and vice versa. It is the basic attraction that is equal. And a kind of *care* about the other. That's the only kind of equality I can find between the two. And the fact that they're both human beings.

Lotringer: Men you went out with, had they previous experience with boys?

Moffett: With young people, yes, but not as young as I was, I guess.

Lotringer: Did you find these men helpful and loving?

Moffett: The man who owned a restaurant, he was very kind and loving. But also he asked a lot. He was very jealous. He didn't want me to have sex with anyone else, which I found difficult.

Lotringer: You were fourteen then?

Moffett: Almost. The other people (an interior designer, a biologist, a carpenter, a student in economics), when they first met me they thought I was older, so that when we had sex they treated me as if I were eighteen.

Lotringer: Have you had any relationship where sex was not the prime motive?

Moffett: When I first came out, what I needed emotionally was friends. And I found that in Gay Youth. So what I am really looking for, occasionally, is just sex. But if I were to lose my friends, I'd fall back in the position of wanting a man to love me.

Lotringer: Sex is not the basis of your relationship with your friends in Gay Youth?

Moffett: No. Most people in Gay Youth don't have relationships with each other. Their relationships are outside. And generally it is with someone older.

Lotringer: What did you learn in Gay Youth?

Moffett: I learned a lot about the gay lifestyle, because that's what you choose when you're gay. I didn't know anything about it. I also learned more about females - lesbians - since it is very open at Gay Youth.

Lotringer: Do you get along well with

lesbians?

Moffett: There is only one regular lesbian at Gay Youth, and she doesn't jump to conclusions. The rest of Gay Youth expects her to care about youth sexuality and recognize youth rights to sexual freedom, and most lesbian feminists expect her to realize that lowering the age of consent means that all these little girls are going to be raped. So she's methodical about it, thinks things out, hears all sides and just puts them together in her head.

Lotinger: In our society as long as a child is not financially independent, he usually has to accept limitations to his freedom. If you were to push your father too far, he would probably tell you, Look, you live at *my* place, so do what *I* want you to do. That's where money is involved with authority. Sexual freedom too has to do with the fact that children are in a state of dependency. Do you think this still holds true now? Do you think you have more freedom than previous generations?

Moffett: I think so. Last fall I ran away from my home because my parents were trying to stop me from seeing my gay friend. Also they didn't want me to go to Gay Youth. I ran away for 6 weeks. I was lucky enough to get a job. I got a room service and a roommate. Before I ran away, my father told me, you can't handle freedom. After 6 weeks I told my parents, Well, it's obvious that I can handle freedom so if I come back home I'm going to have total freedom like I have now. And they agreed to that. I don't actually have *total* freedom. I promised I'd make school my first priority. I also agreed to let them know where I was going, or at least give them a number, which is not too much.

Lotinger: Why did your father change his mind?

Moffett: He didn't want me being around adults.

Lotinger: Why?

Moffett: I'm not really sure. Maybe he seriously thought I would get hurt, or maybe he felt threatened by me hanging around people who are older and learning things from them.

Lotinger: People as old as he is?

Moffett: Not really as old, but adults.

Lotinger: Do you think there might have been a sense of competition?

Moffett: Yes. Against him.

Lotinger: Do you see your father differently as a result of having a close relationship with other adults?

Moffett: I don't think so. I always thought of him as my father. Since he is my father I have to give him some respect.

Lotinger: The same holds for your teachers?

Moffett: Yes. For some reason I thought that.

Lotinger: Do you still think that way?

Moffett: No. Now I still care and love him because he is my father, but I speak more and more on an equal level. Before I ran away, I would never talk to him. If something pissed me off that he did I would never talk about it. I was afraid I would be told to shut up. So we never had much of a relationship.

Lotinger: Do you think he recognizes you now as having valid opinions on the way you want to lead your life?

Moffett: I really don't know. Sometimes I feel he thinks that I am just a stupid kid. Sometimes I feel that he doesn't care.

Lotinger: When you ran away from home, you were lucky enough to find a job. Lots of boys in that situation go into hustling.

Moffett: I've hustled, and I've known people that have. But I never saw it as a relationship with men, just as a way to get money - as a job.

Lotinger: You never thought of hustling as a permanent professional?

Moffett: No.

Lotinger: If you had to, would you do it again?

Moffett: More than likely.

Lotinger: Has your opinion of adults in general changed?

Moffett: I think they don't give us enough respect. My father told me I had an attitude of defiance. I've been "rebellious," as they say, against a lot of things they didn't want. But I also learned from them. I respect their opinions on things. When a man tells me (it happened this week) that school should be my number one priority, it gives me a new determination to do well. It's much easier to listen to him, although I'm more willing to

listen to my parents too afterwards. It helped me mature in a certain way. Had I not been involved in sexual relationships with adults, I would have ended up a typical teenager, like all my friends.

Lotinger: Now that you know them more intimately, do you still feel like becoming an adult?

Moffett: Naturally because then I'll gain this independence.

Lotinger: If you could become independent without growing up further, like Oscar in *The Tin Drum*, would you rather remain a boy?

Moffett: I would like to be an adult, creating something, building up. Of course, I hope to bring up a family.

Lotinger: A family?

Moffett: Not a wife-kids-dogs and house. A lover. Right now I don't know what I feel about having children. I don't know if I would or not. I don't think it's even legal now to adopt children. I just want to have a life-long relationship.

Lotinger: If you could get married to a man, would you do it?

Moffett: Well, I don't know what I think about this whole marriage business. I would rather live with someone so that I still have that sense of freedom.

Lotinger: You said earlier that sex education should teach you that sex is good. Do you recognize any boundary to sex? Incest, for example, involves the same cross-generational relationship that you are into, only within the family. Would you feel as comfortable sexually in an incestuous situation as you would be having sex with any adult? Is there something you consider "natural" and something that you don't?

Moffett: (Silence) That's very hard to say.

Lotinger: It would be hard for anyone.

Would you feel there is something weird about incestuous sex?

Moffett: Do I?

Lotinger: Imagine having sex with your parents. They are adults. They would be capable of being objects of desire. Have you ever thought about it?

Moffett: Yes. But I'm not really attracted. I'm sure it could be very normal because I hear

stories all the time about it. It doesn't seem to be abnormal - as long as it is not rape and doesn't hurt the child.

Lotinger: You mean it would have to be consensual.

Moffett: Yes. I read a story about a father and a son. The son just told the father he is gay and that he is interested in older men. And they just form a sexual relationship.

Lotinger: Do you find that shocking?

Moffett: When I first read it, yes, because it's sort of rare. But as long as it was consensual, I really don't see what's wrong with it.

Lotinger: You don't think the law should forbid anything of that sort.

Moffett: No. I think the state should stay out of people's bedrooms.

I was "Only a Kid" to My Mother's Lovers

Sky

This piece was contributed by Sky, who left home at 15 to work with Youth Liberation of Ann Arbor, to the 1978 Youth Liberation anthology Growing Up Gay. Along with the FPS magazine, Youth Liberation published pamphlets and books which discussed youth liberation and related topics such as youth culture, high school women's liberation, and student and youth organizing.

I've always been more attracted to women than men. That's not to say I've never been attracted to a man, but I've always been more comfortable with women - physically, socially and emotionally.

Although my best friend called me a 'lesbian' at age 9 when I tried to sit very close to her, I didn't consider myself a lesbian until I was 11. That year I moved in with my wild 'liberal' mother, and I met some of her lesbian friends. I finally saw that women loving women were real, and not a myth.

I've never felt any guilt about my lesbianism, but I've been hurt many times by the ageist and anti-gay attitudes I've encountered. For example, many adults (gay or straight) repress sexual feelings they have toward young people, and ignore any sexual desires that young people have toward them. Gay adults are especially afraid of showing any sexual or physical affection to young people because of the danger of being labeled a 'child molester'.

Statutory rape laws contribute to this fear, while effectively taking away young people's rights to sexual lives. Adults can be convicted of statutory rape (having a sexual relationship with a minor) regardless of the young person's consent. One of my woman lovers flatly admitted that it was fear that had made her reject my crush on her four years earlier. Even my mother's lover, Catherine, refrained from touching or kissing me, or my mother in my presence, despite the love she felt for both of us.

The sexual exclusion I experienced is very much tied to the social limits placed on me because of my youth. None of my mother's lesbian friends developed a relationship with me independent of my mother. Ageism infects the gay community just as it does the straight one.

Consider that there are no gay advocates in America working for sexual, social and economic freedom for kids. Nor are there many gay adults trying to include young people in their struggles against homophobia. And the 'Sexual Sanity' petition circulated by Ms. (magazine) limits its demand to freedom of sexual activity for consenting adults only. My mother's lesbian friends, like much of the gay community, didn't realize I had any sexuality. Most of them didn't see me as a whole person at all, but just 'Sabrina's kid'.

I've never hidden my lesbianism, but to this day there are many people who are unaware of it because of their ageist or heterosexist assumptions. My experiences have shown me that it is as necessary to fight the ageism of the gay community as the straightness of the rest of the world. Without both of these struggles, young gay people will never be liberated.

I'm 14, I'm gay & I want a boyfriend

Lee

This interview with Lee, performed by human rights campaigner and journalist Peter Tatchell, was published in the gay and lesbian weekly magazine Thud (August 15, 1997). Though it's unfortunate that Lee himself did not get to write the article, Tatchell at the very least extensively quotes Lee's words and allows him to speak for himself. Tatchell himself was involved with the radical queer group OutRage! and led a campaign of theirs to lower the age of consent from 16 to 14.

Lee is 14. He's been having sex with boys since the age of eight, and with men since he was 12. Lee has a serious problem. He wants a steady relationship and has been going out recently with a guy in his mid-twenties, who he met at the hairdressers. But in the eyes of the law, Lee's partner is a paedophile and Lee is a victim of child abuse. That's not, however, the way Lee sees it: "I want to have a boyfriend. It's my choice. No one's abusing me. Why should we be treated like criminals?"

I am sitting in the kitchen of a friend's house talking with Lee. Wearing a white T-shirt and combat trousers, his sophisticated gay image makes him look older than 14. He comes across as bright, articulate, sure of himself, and mature beyond his years. It's hard to imagine anyone getting away with taking advantage of him.

We are discussing the new Sex Offenders Act. Lee is concerned. Under this legislation, which comes into effect next month, men over 19 who have consensual sex with guys under 18 are classified as dangerous sex criminals, on a par with the abusers of young children. After serving their sentence, they will be required to register their address with the police for a minimum of five years, and may have their identity revealed to the public.

This is a live issue for Lee because he prefers relationships with older guys. "I don't get on with people my own age," says Lee. "They're too immature. I like men in their 20s or early 30s. They are more experienced and serious. With them, you can get into a closer relationship than with a teenager."

The age of consent laws don't make it easy for Lee to have a stable gay relationship. "Some men run a mile when they discover how old I am," he moans. "They're worried about getting done by the law."

Even without the Sex Offenders Act, any man who has sex with Lee could face a maximum sentence of 10 years for kissing, touching, sucking or wanking, and life imprisonment for anal sex. The top penalty for the offence of "unlawful sexual intercourse" with a 14 year old girl is, in contrast, two years!

Having a relationship with someone his own age would, paradoxically, put Lee in greater legal danger than sex with an older person. The law says that a homosexual act with a male under 16 is a serious crime, even if the person committing the act is himself below the age of 16. So, by having anal sex with another 14 year old boy, Lee would be guilty of a major offence which can, at least in theory, be punished by jail for life.

"The law is stupid," according to Lee. "If I know what I'm doing and I'm not harming anyone else, I should be allowed to have sex with who I want."

Lee is just one of a growing number of lesbians and gays who are coming out at an ever earlier age...twelve, thirteen and fourteen is not uncommon nowadays. Research published by Project Sigma in 1993 shows that 9 percent of gay men had their first homosexual experience by the age of 10, 19 percent by the age of 12, and 35 per cent by the

age of 14. Yet most gay campaign groups seem only interested in the human rights of the over-16s. "There's nothing much for young gays like me," says Lee. "Nobody cares about our rights."

Lee first realised he was gay at the age of eight. Well, he didn't call himself gay. He just had sex with boys or, to begin with, one particular boy. "My first gay sex was with a friend from school called John. I was eight and half. He was the same age. We used to go swimming together. It all started at the local swimming pool. One day we were in the cubicles getting changed and somehow we started kissing. Then we had oral sex."

How did you know what to do? "Oh, I saw it on TV," quips Lee. You did? "They were talking about men having oral sex, so that's where I got the idea from."

Weren't you nervous about being caught? "No. It just happened. I didn't think it might be wrong or that we could get into trouble."

How did you feel about your first gay experience? Lee beams with evident fond memories and confides: "I liked it a lot. It was great. But I did think sex with a boy was sort of strange. Until that time with John, I didn't have much idea about sex. It was mostly from the papers and television. I thought that men only had sex with women. For a while it left me feeling a bit weird and confused." He pauses for a moment, then adds emphatically: "I soon got over it."

Lee continued having regular sex with John for two years. "We were boyfriends," he boasts proudly. "I don't have any regrets at all."

The relationship with John did not, however, stop Lee from experimenting with heterosexuality. "I had sex with John's twin sister. He found out and got very angry. He stormed out. For a while we weren't speaking. We made up afterwards."

Did you enjoy straight sex? "Yeah," says Lee, "but sex with John was better."

So when did Lee start thinking of himself as being gay? "It was a few months later, after I turned nine. I was watching a TV debate about gays. It made me realise that I was gay, and that it wasn't wrong. Since then, I've never had a problem about my sexuality."

Lee's next big love affair happened when he was ten. "It was with a black kid who lived on my road, Michael. He was the same age. My friends introduced him. One day, we were in his bedroom playing on his computer and we started messing around. It ended up with sex. Other times, we had a game called 'kick the cancan,' which involved kicking a can around. The can would often end up in the bushes, and we'd run there to look for it. Sometimes Michael and me would have sex there."

Around this time, Lee first came out to his mom. "She was good about it. Her first reaction was that I was a bit too young to be gay. She told me to leave it a couple of years. Then, if I still wanted to be gay, she said she'd accept it. I left it a few weeks, before telling her again. She realised I was serious, and respected my feelings and wishes. Ever since, she's been really understanding."

At the age of 11, Lee had a relationship with a 14 year old named Andrew. "Because of family difficulties, I ended up in a children's home. They sent me to an education centre. That's where I met Andrew. We used to hang around together and became really close friends. After a while he told me that he was on the rent scene. I asked him if he wanted a boyfriend and he said yeah. So we started going out with each other. That was when I first had anal sex and learned about condoms. Andrew pulled out a packet and went on about stopping HIV and AIDS. I shagged him and he shagged me. It brought tears to my eyes. It was painful, but I liked it as well. I enjoyed it more than sex with a girl. I got more of a sexual sensation."

For about 18 months, Lee joined Andrew doing sex for money, picking up men in the local gardens and bus station. "It was mostly me just wanking them off. I stopped about a year and half ago. When I was doing it, I felt sick. I didn't enjoy it. I was only doing it for the money to buy drugs – mostly speed, acid and cannabis. I also had a few bad experiences

with punters. Once Andrew and I were tied up and raped."

In the children's home, Lee got taunted and bullied for being gay. "They called me queer and it ended up in fights. The staff didn't do anything to protect me, so I started running away."

Lee is clearly very angry that no one took action to stop the bullying: "When I was being beaten up, the authorities did nothing. Now I'm gay and want to have sex, they're suddenly very concerned about my welfare."

When you ran away from the children's home, where did you go? "I used to stay with this paedophile that I met in the gardens. He was okay. There was no pressure for me to have sex, but I did. I had sex with him because I wanted to feel loved and respected."

What do you think of that man now? "Well, he didn't beat me up or hurt me like was happening in the children's home."

And what do you think about paedophiles in general? "It depends on what kind of paedophiles," says Lee. "The paedophiles I knew always asked me if I wanted sex. They didn't pressure me. If you consent to having sex with a paedophile, it's fine. If you don't, it's not."

How can a young child understand sex and give meaningful consent? Lee admits: "The really young ones can't. But I was 12 when I first had sex with an adult man. I knew what was happening. The other boys I know who had sex with men were in their early teens. They understood what they were doing."

Perhaps your friends were particularly mature for their age. Most young people are not so sophisticated about sex. "They shouldn't have sex then," according to Lee. "And other people shouldn't take advantage of them. No one should be having sex with a child who is very young or who has emotional and mental problems. You could have a relationship with them, but not sex – not until they are old enough to understand the responsibilities involved."

Many people worry that the power imbalance in a relationship between a youth and an adult means the younger person can be easily manipulated and exploited. It's a concern that Lee acknowledges: "Yeah, that can happen. It's wrong. But that doesn't mean that every kid who has sex with a man is being abused."

At what age do you think people should to be allowed, by law, to have sex? "Sixteen is too high," says Lee. "Most kids I know had sex long before then. It's stupid for the law to brand us as criminals."

Do you worry about being arrested for under-age sex? "Sometimes. I mostly worry for the older guys that I'm having sex with. They could get life imprisonment and be denounced as a paedophile. They might end up on the sex offenders register. It could ruin their life."

What do you think the age of consent should be? "About 14." Why? "That's the age a lot of young people start having sex. If they are not forcing or hurting other kids they shouldn't have the threat of a policeman knocking on their door. The current age of 16 (or 18 for gays) means that those who are younger don't get proper sex education. My sex education at school was useless. The law makes it difficult for teachers to give out stuff about contraception, safer sex and AIDS. If the age was lower, the facts about sex could be taught sooner. It's stupid giving kids this information after they've started sex. That's too late. They need to know the facts about sex from around the age of 10."

I point out to Lee that an age of consent of 14 would not have been much help to him, since he was having sex from the age of eight. Even with consent at 14, most of his past sexual relationships would have remained illegal. "Young people under 14 should be allowed to have sex with someone up to a year or so older," he suggests. "That way they've got freedom, and are protected against exploitation by older men."

Even with a permitted one year age differential, Lee's affair with Andrew, who was three years older, would not have been legal. Something a bit more flexible is required.

The idea of a sliding-scale age of consent is something that OutRage! is promoting. In addition to supporting an age of consent of 14 for everyone (gay and straight), OutRage! argues that sex involving young people under 14 should not be prosecuted providing both partners consent and there is no more than three years difference in their ages.

When I put this idea to Lee, he nods with approval: "Some young people mature earlier than others. They should be able to have a relationship with someone a bit older. Society should accept that kids have sexual feelings."

This is the nub of the problem. Our current legal system refuses to acknowledge that young people have a sexuality. The law says a person under 16 is incapable of giving their consent to a sexual act. Any sex with such a person is automatically deemed "indecent assault." Lee thinks that is "ridiculous": "I'm only 14 but I know what I'm doing. I understand what consent involves. So does the person I'm having sex with. No one is indecently assaulting me. That's a stupid suggestion. The law should stop treating young people like idiots."

Many people fear that making sex easier for under-age teenagers will expose them to dangers like HIV. Isn't that a legitimate worry? "I know about safer sex," protests Lee. "I didn't get that information from school. It came from TV and boyfriends. Some of them had HIV and died. I'm okay because we did safer sex. People say that older guys will take advantage of teenagers like me, but my partners made sure we took precautions – even the paedophiles. If people want to protect kids against AIDS, they should support better sex education lessons, starting in primary school. Education is the best prevention. But it isn't happening in most schools. Why doesn't someone make a fuss about that?"

Lee thinks it's time the law-makers listened to young people: "They are always trying to tell us how to live our lives. Why don't they treat us with respect? We've got opinions. We deserve to be heard. When a kid gets sexually abused, the social workers listen to what he says and back up his complaint. But when a kid wants to have a gay relationship, his wishes get ignored. That's what is happening to me. I'm under a care order which states that my feelings have to be taken into account. But society won't accept my feelings. It says I'm forbidden to have sex with a man until I'm 18. A perfect relationship is what I want. It would make me very happy. So why is the law trying to stop me?"

Scrap the "Young Love" Laws

Shocking Pink Collective

Shocking Pink was a feminist magazine which existed from 1979 to 1992, written entirely by young women for young women. Arising from talk at a young women's 1979 feminist conference, the magazine was helped and supported by the larger feminist magazine Spare Rib, which ran ads about Shocking Pink and helped the young women learn how to put together their magazine. The magazine's contents contained subjects such as gender, race, music, politics and, as this piece shows, sexuality and the law. The following piece appeared in the first issue, which came out late 1980 or early 1981.

Fury over bid to make sex under 16 legal

About a year ago a report by the National Council for One Parent Families came out, calling for the abolition of the Age of Consent laws for heterosexuals. This led to some wild reporting in the press.

You probably know that under these laws it is illegal for a man to have intercourse with a woman if she is under sixteen years of age.

Maybe a few of you are thinking that this law protects young women, for example from rape. In fact there are very few prosecutions under this law and when they do happen they are against young people who have *both* consented.

I talked to some women, all of whom are under sixteen, about what *they* thought about the laws.

'Why age of consent law is out-dated'

I think this is ridiculous and am against the age of consent laws for both heterosexuals and homosexuals, because I believe that all people who give their consent to sex, both young and old should have the right to determine their own sex lives.

At the moment, if a woman under sixteen decides to enter into a sexual relationship, it means she can be placed in care on the grounds that she is in 'moral danger' to herself because of her, wait for it, 'abnormal sexual appetite'.

It is only the man who can be prosecuted, as the law says that whether she wanted sex or not is irrelevant. We as women are not taken seriously. When these laws were thought up, our sexual desires were ignored, in fact it was thought that we didn't have any. An example of this is that there is no age of consent for lesbians as Queen Victoria didn't think it was possible for women to have fulfilling sexual relationships together.

Sex under 16 storm

A STORM of protest last night greeted a Government-financed report calling for the age of sexual consent, at present 16, to be abolished.

It's stupid, no one takes any notice anyway, if they want to sleep with people they will do it regardless of the law.

Have you slept with a boy?

Yes.

Are you taking any precautions?

No.

Why not?

'Cause I don't want to go to the doctor as he'd tell my Mum.

It's alright but people should be allowed to do what they want, they shouldn't get prosecuted.

Do you think that the law would stop you?

Probably, but I don't want to sleep with anyone yet anyway.

If the laws were abolished, would it make any difference?

No, people do it when they want, but I think that when they do they should be able to get contraception.

I don't think that it is a good idea.

Why?

Everyone should be able to do what they want to.

Have you ever slept with a boy?

No.

Is it the law that's stopped you?

No, I just don't want to do it.

You think it should be lowered to 12. Why not get rid of it altogether?

If it was any lower people would get forced into it.

Why?

'Cause men are men.

Why 12?

'Cause you know what you want at that age.

Sense not sensation

These laws are a result of a society which punishes consenting young people, while turning a blind eye to a lot of cases of rape and violence.

We as young women get the worst of it all round. Some doctors won't give contraception to women under sixteen years, and a lot of young women are frightened to go and get contraception, or to tell a doctor they are pregnant in case the doctor tells their parents.

The report was bitterly attacked last night by Mrs. Mary Whitehouse.

She said: "The one message children will receive from this report is that sex is okay. This can only lead to greater promiscuity among the young with consequent rises in venereal disease and cervical cancer."

I believe that all women should have the right to abortion on demand, free contraception, and we should be able to get info on these things at any age.

I'm not saying that we should all be having sex before we are sixteen. What I am saying however, is that at the moment the law decides when we should have sex, *not us*; the law says when we should get contraception, *not us*; the law says whether we can have an abortion, *not us*.

We should not have our sexual relationships made illegal and should not be punished for them. We must have the right to determine our own sex lives.

* * *

One letter sent in about the piece was published and replied to in the second issue

Dear Shocking Pink,

This concerns the article about sex under 16. I think that if the law was changed it should go higher not lower although I think 16 is about right. I agree contraception should be available to all women regardless of age.

If the age was lowered to 12 a virgin would be a rare thing. I disagree that a girl of 12 knows what she wants. You should only make love if you love your boyfriend. You have to be mature to love somebody that much and I think at 12 a girl just isn't mature enough, many aren't at sixteen. The trouble with the present law is that when a girl is 16, she may think "Great, I can do it now", and lose her virginity to the first boy she meets. I know a couple of friends who had sex under 16 and now regret it because they've finished with that boy and feel used. I think this is a very hard subject to discuss.

Sarah Kelly

Dear Sister,

We feel that your letter glorifies virginity in a way that's oppressive to women - who ever worries about men being virgins? We feel that women's sexuality should be recognized in its own right instead of being seen as belonging to other people - the idea of having to love your 'boyfriend' before having sex denies women the right to explore their own sexuality and pleasures. Love doesn't have to equal sex - sex can be great by itself.

Also the idea of 'maturity' in our society is a bit contradictory - young people in general aren't treated as people or adults so how can they be 'mature'? The whole idea of 'maturity' stems from adult prejudice; it's people and their attitudes that matter regardless of age.

We feel that age doesn't necessarily have anything to do with a woman's ability to make decisions, it's just society's attitude to age that puts more pressure on the younger woman and makes it more difficult for her.

Shocking Pink

I Know What I Am: Gay Teenagers and the Law

Joint Council For Gay Teenagers

This piece is an excerpted section of I Know What I Am: Gay Teenagers and the Law, an 18-page publication put out by the Joint Council For Gay Teenagers (JCGT) in 1980 in response to the government's "Working Paper on the Age of Consent." JCGT, which existed from 1978 to 1982 when it was absorbed into the Gay Youth Movement, helped gay youth groups in the UK to connect with each other and published material for youth workers and the gay movement.

The purpose of this response is straightforward: it is to make it clear beyond doubt that young homosexual people of both sexes are a reality and are, in our society, demanding recognition and possible support, not legal sanctions. This response is therefore addressed only to those parts of the Working Paper¹ dealing with the age of consent or "minimum age" for homosexual relations.

The Joint Council for Gay Teenagers (JCGT), set up in late 1978, comprises many of the principal organizations in the United Kingdom that provide support to young gay people. Our constituent organizations have a great deal of first hand experience and knowledge of gay teenagers' needs. We are aware not only of the difficulties they often face but also that a new generation of gay people is growing up unwilling to suffer as previous generations have been expected to. Indeed the separation between "them" and "us" is false, as many gay men under the present minimum age and many young lesbians help run the support services for gay people.

During 1979 the JCGT also collected statements from 98 gay teenagers in England, Wales and Scotland. Seventeen of these were supplied by a Manchester-based group who had collected them as part of a separate project. In addition some extracts were provided from letters written to a member organization during the previous two years. Together, these present a unique record of how young gay men and women see themselves and the frequently hostile world in which they live. It is interesting that it is only with the emergence of the gay movement during the 1970s that it has become possible to collect such statements which originate not from the traditional clinical or penal settings but from ordinary life. Extracts from these have been used as illustrations throughout this response. Except where the teenagers themselves insisted otherwise, identities have been disguised.

Behind much of the discussion in the paper on the minimum age for homosexual relations between men is the specter of a teenage boy readily cajoled into gay sexual acts; and the unprovable and improbable theory that seduction will fix the sexual orientation of those for whom it has previously not been fixed. Although such a theory would presumably work in both directions, the Policy Advisory Committee evidently is concerned solely with the supposed pressures on heterosexual (or "potentially heterosexual") people. This is really special pleading since, even if the case they make out were true, it is not balanced by the opposite and much more evident and widespread pressures on young gay people.

The world the Joint Council lives in, far from encouraging homosexuality in young people, is daily filled with heterosexual propaganda - in advertising, in entertainment, in the news media, in religion, in school and so on. This propaganda frequently takes the

form of openly anti-homosexual prejudice and jibes. The "strong disapproval" of homosexual relations that the Committee identifies too often spills over into acts of physical violence against gay people. Young gay women frequently have to put up with unwanted advances from heterosexual men, which they are expected to find flattering, or which are openly hostile.

It is under these sorts of pressures that young gay people have to grow up. More often than not they feel themselves unable to talk to anyone at all about their emotions and needs, and live lives of almost total repression and isolation. Many have adopted, at least partially, society's negative valuation of their sexuality. Their sexual relationships and general contact with other gay people, in these circumstances, are necessarily restricted to ones that are furtive and unsatisfactory to themselves.

Some of these young gay men and women are subjected to severe pressures by their peer group, family, psychiatrists and others to get married. The gay help organizations frequently have calls from married people, some of whom (mostly men) were specifically advised to get married as a "cure" for their homosexuality. In these cases the spouses are used as an unknowing instrument of those who cannot accept the validity of homosexual feelings. This leads to immense personal complications and unhappiness. Whilst women often come to terms with the fact that they have married a gay man, it is common for a man to brutally reject a wife who he finds is lesbian. Where there are children, courts often deny custody and limit access for the gay parent.

It is only in the last decade or so that this bleak pattern of repression, and the resultant distortions in relationships, have been broken to any great extent - by the efforts of gay people themselves.

In light of this picture, it is odd that the Committee should concentrate so much in their Working Paper on imagined dangers to heterosexual young men and ignore the evident pressures on homosexuals of both sexes. It is even odder that the Committee should link this imagined danger to prostitution. The popular press always finds prostitution (heterosexual or homosexual) an attractive topic, but it is not a significant issue in relation to the vast majority of gay people of any age. No doubt this wrong emphasis is a result of the way homosexuality has been treated traditionally, as a purely penal or clinical matter, and not as part of everyday life.

The law cannot of itself change social attitudes and prejudices, but it should have no part in reinforcing their ill effects. The Committee appears to have some notion of these ill effects but fails to make the connect between them and the way the law operates. Gay people are not going to go away: they will only prosper or suffer according to the way society - including the law - regards them. The situation is analogous to the way the law influences race relations or sex equality.

Jeff, 19, Speke:

After I met Mike I started to spend a lot of time with him, staying at his house overnight sometimes.... When I was 15 I went to court and they made a care order [commitment to an institution]. They did it partly because of Mike. I hated it in care and I used to run away to stay with Mike. Eventually they prosecuted Mike. I was 16 at the time and I had to go to court. It was a bad time. We had a good lawyer and Mike got off with probation.... I think all we have been through has brought us together more.

Glyn, 19, Manchester:

My man was caught cottaging [cruising] and arrested. The next day four policemen came to school to collect me and take me to the police station. There I was given a

rigorous medical and interrogated intensely. My life was wrecked.... I didn't go to school for three months. I was recovering from a nervous breakdown.... The case spanned nearly a year and eventually he was sentenced to eighteen months in prison.

Trevor, 17, Northhampton:

When I rang (the number of a local gay group) he said... that I was too young for him to help me.... If I don't meet someone soon, I swear, I'll do something I'll regret. I wish people could understand how lonely it can be.

Although the law has much less to say specifically about lesbian sexual activities, young lesbians too sometimes suffer at the hands of the law by being treated as in "moral danger" and having care orders imposed on them.

A vital part of helping gay people to lead happy and fulfilling lives (just as it is for heterosexual people) is to provide them from an early age with positive advice, with others whose lives can act as models for their own, and the opportunity to experience relationships and emotions. The Committee appears to accept this for gay men 18 and over, although they have nothing to say on this subject in relation to women. But apparently they would prefer gay men under 18 either to repress their sexual feelings entirely or to face the threat of penal sanctions if they can not or will not do so. At present it is only that fortunate minority of gay teenagers aged under 18 who have contacted gay help services who are able to grow up without first going through a long period of isolation, private torture and self-rejection.

Colin, 17, Leicester:

I was so isolated and always far too nervous to attend any type of meeting. I became more and more depressed and finally called Gayline (when I was 15) and asked for a befriending meeting. It was so good just to meet two other gay people. I was very happy for a long while afterwards, just knowing that I wasn't the only one.... I have a lot more confidence and I am able to cope much better at work. Other people just don't bother me any more. Things would certainly be very different if I had no social life and no gay friends to give me encouragement and support. The second time maybe I would have cut my wrists properly.

Sue, 18, Highbury:

....whilst in the company of gay women I felt great. To me there didn't seem to be anything "bad" or "wrong" but for a while I clung to the idea that it was better to wait until society's attitude towards gays changed.... I could have been waiting forever!

Peter, 19, Leicester:

My feelings of loneliness and isolation disappeared completely.... I have told all my close friends that I am gay, a thing I would have found impossible to do had I not known other gay people.

Martin, 17, Edinburgh:

Now I feel "Thank God I'm gay." The only thing that makes me depressed sometimes is other people's attitudes to homosexuality.

Tim (female), 19, Cardiff:

Now I'm happy and quite proud. It's my way of life.

Phil, 18, Kirkby:

I began to see that being gay was not as bad as it's painted, and to lose the idea that gays are dirty old men.

Many gay people will continue to experience unhappiness unless and until there is an acceptance that the next generation of gay adults is today's gay children and teenagers. The problem is as much how to deal with the attitudes and behavior of heterosexual people, young and old, towards homosexuality as is it how to deal with young gay people themselves. The law at present operates as an obstacle in the way of tackling this situation. On one side of the coin schools, youth services and so on feel inhibited in dealing openly and helpfully with homosexuality in their curricula and programs; while on the other side young gay people who need positive acceptance of their personal identities if they are to fully realize their part in society, both in work and leisure, are denied any relevant sex education and suffer the ignorance of others, and agencies or individuals who would help them are constantly at risk.

Peter, 19, Leicester:

I think I always knew what I was and accepted it myself. The biggest shock came when I went to comprehensive school and discovered words like "queer," "poof," etc., and realized that I was one of these "vile, disgusting perverts" and as far as I knew the only one. I was very often physically and mentally bullied at school and several times narrowly escaped violent attacks.... Because of the abuse I shut myself off from the outside, not only at school but at home as well.... The sex education talks at school never mentioned homosexuality and I assumed that it was so uncommon that it wasn't worth mentioning.

Stephen, 15, London:

....every boy at school calls me a "poof" or a "queer" and some say things like "Hello, love" and "How's your bum, love?" I feel like throwing myself under a bus sometimes.

David, 18, Yorkshire:

....it would be helpful if sex education in schools would include gay sex instead of being totally heterosexual in orientation.

The Committee fails to follow its own logic that the slower rate of biological development of boys (compared with that of girls) is no more a reason for prohibiting homosexual than heterosexual intercourse until the age of 18. They instead say that the proposed effective difference in minimum age for lesbians and gay men can be justified by their different rates of development.

The underlying feeling of the Committee appears therefore to be that homosexuality is much more worrying to them in the case of men than in women. This is evidenced by the fact that lesbians are accorded only one paragraph to themselves, while the bulk of the other 34 paragraphs in the section on homosexuality is concerned exclusively with men.

The needs of young lesbians include exactly those we have described above. Admittedly the current effective minimum age of 16 for lesbians is far preferable to the age proposed for men. But the balance of the Working Paper reflects exactly one special difficulty for lesbians - that the sexuality of women is frequently discounted and ignored. In this way the Working Paper, despite its claim to go some way towards meeting the demand for equality between the sexes, is in fact little more than a reflection of the most basic sex discrimination, in which the sexuality of men is accorded prime importance.

What We Propose

It follows from the foregoing arguments that a minimum age of 16 for homosexual men we would regard as far preferable to one of 18. It is tempting to reinforce the point by showing that, on the Home Office's own evidence², if this minimum age had already been 16 only about 25 persons convicted in 1973 for consensual behavior would not have been so convicted. But what is at stake is human happiness is, as we have tried to show above, far greater than the figure implies; and in precisely the reverse direction to that assumed by the Committee.

Patrick, 17, London suburb:

I hope that discrimination against gay people stops sooner or later. I think it's wrong, especially things like age of consent. I hope that maybe I'll see it in my lifetime.

Jim, 19, Colchester:

They could make (the age of consent) 16 or 14, or abolish it altogether. It's probably less important to have an age of consent for gay males than for heterosexual couples - after all, there are no babies.

Robert, 18, Essex:

I feel as though I'll go insane if I have to wait until I'm 21 as my parents have suggested, before they allow me to stay homosexual.

It would be wholly unsatisfactory if the law, even with a minimum age of 16, still made it risky for support and counseling services, gay and non-gay, to offer help and advice and self-defined gay people younger than 16. The only humane and logical step would be to abolish the concept of a minimum age altogether for homosexuals or both sexes and to rely instead on the laws dealing with common assault where there is evidence that a sexual act was not consensual. The Joint Council is not alone in this view which has already been put forward by the Sexual Law Reform Society³ and the National Council for Civil Liberties⁴. But both of these organizations, while accepting the logic of this view, drew back from incorporating it in their specific proposals. More recently a Joint Working Party on Pregnant Schoolgirls and Schoolgirl Mothers has recommended the repeal of the law relating to the heterosexual age of consent⁵.

The same Working Party makes other recommendations about prosecution policy⁶ which we endorse. Some of the arguments it puts forward concerning the negative effect which the age of consent has on the welfare of consenting young heterosexual people have parallels in the case of young gay people; for example a legal minimum age deters them from seeking advice on relationships or on avoiding exploitive or unwanted relationships. This kind of advice is probably more important for people under 18.

If a minimum age of 16 were adopted we strongly recommend that prosecution policy strictly limit its use to cases where consent was absent or where the younger partner was less than 14 years old. Even in the latter cases which were found to be consensual, penalties should be limited to fines and community service orders.

The only civilized answer to the question put to the Policy Advisory Committee would be to remove consensual sexual acts altogether from the realm of the criminal law. Only then can hundreds of thousands of young gay people freely seek and receive the best help and advice, make relationships of their choosing without constant fear of sanction, and use their energies and skills fully to make the world a better, kinder place. Only then, too, can the heterosexual majority obtain the help and education it needs to live in harmony with gay women and men at home, at school and at work.

NOTES

1. Home Office, Policy Advisory Committee on Sexual Offences, *Working Paper on the Age of Consent in relation to Sexual Offences*, June 1979, HMSO.
2. Home Office Research Study No. 54, *Sexual Offences, Consent and Sentencing* (1979), HMSO, p. 9.
3. *Report of Working Party on the Law in relation to Sexual Behaviour*, 1974
4. *Evidence to the Criminal Law Revision Committee*, 1976
5. National Council for One Parent Families and Community Development Trust, *Pregnant at School*, 1979, para 314
6. *Ibid.*, para 313

Girl and Woman

Amy

Texan lesbian Amy was 16 when she wrote this originally untitled essay for the 1983 anthology One Teenager in Ten: Writings by Gay and Lesbian Youth. The anthology came about after a request for submissions in the back of another one of the publisher's gay youth-centered books, Young, Gay and Proud. This piece was one of the few removed from the book's 1994 update, Two Teenagers in Twenty.

I am a sixteen-year-old lesbian. I have been a lesbian since I was twelve. I had known my dance teacher for three years before she brought me out. I was very attracted to her when I first saw her, and from then on, I grew to be more and more in love with her. When I was ten, I had a crush on a friend of my older sister, and some time after that another crush on a cousin of mine. But these didn't last long.

I always wanted to be near my teacher, dance well for her, and have her touch me! Often while falling asleep at night I would think about her holding me in her arms while I'd go to sleep or about her kissing me. I didn't know anything about lesbians then, so I didn't associate my feelings with anything but my love for her.

We became lovers the weekend I was asked to give a special dance presentation in another city. My dance instructor chose me and accompanied me there. She was 23.

After the performance, we returned to our room. She was elated with my reception, and hugged me and told me how good I was. I felt so good being held by her, being so close to her; secure in the arms of a woman I had admired and loved for three years.

Her eyes were so alive, so exciting; her smile so sensuous. When she said, "Let me help you take this off," I could only hope something might happen. I let my arms hang loose as she slipped the leotards over my shoulders, then I cooperated with her so my arms could be freed, leaving the costume hanging at my waist, with my breasts bare.

"You are so pretty," she said, placing her hands on my neck and then running them down my chest and then running them down my chest, over my breasts and then cupping them in her hands. I loved what she was doing, especially when she licked her index finger and began rubbing my left nipple, making it hard. She did the same with the right one, and I held her tightly around the waist.

"Does this feel good?" she asked.

"Yes, don't stop."

Then she took a nipple in each hand and rolled them between her fingers. At the same time she moved closer to me. From the waist down we were touching; from the waist up, separated enough for her to get her hands on my breasts. Somehow our lips met, tentative at first and then we kissed passionately with her tongue edging its way into my mouth. I began sucking her tongue, and for the first time I felt tingly all over. My next sensation was our deep breathing, then I felt her hands move from my front to my back, and she pressed tighter to me. Then she moved her hands down to my butt, massaging, and pushing my pelvis into hers. When I felt some thrusts of her pelvis against mine, my eyes opened wide. She responded by saying, "You really turn me on...do you like this?"

"Oh, yes."

She said "Let's take this off," referring to the costume still covering my bottom. Down it came, and I stepped out of it.

She held me at arms length, saying, "I want to look at you." Her hands moved from my neck, to my shoulders, down over my nipples to my waist; one hand on each side. Then she told me I was sexy and moved her right hand down my stomach and lower. I knew what she was going to do, hoping those sensations I had felt before would be even better. They were, as she concentrated on my clitoris with a circular motion, slipping her middle finger between my lips and occasionally into me.

"I want to make love to you. Let's go to bed."

We continued that night, all weekend and for almost three years until I had to move with my family. I became a lesbian and a woman that weekend!

My teacher was the first person I can recall who ever used the word lesbian to me. After she brought me out, and I started going over to her house, I noticed books about lesbianism out in the open. I picked one up, and looked through it. She began telling me about lesbianism and people's attitudes towards homosexuals. Until that time, I can't recall ever thinking that what we were doing was unacceptable. For one thing, I always thought that what boys and girls did to each other was bad. Besides that, I thought what we had was special, and since some of the other girls had a crush on my teacher, I wanted her all to myself. So I thought the secrecy and privacy was for that reason; not because others would think it was bad.

I think that finding out that people think homosexuality is bad made me more firm in my desire to stay a lesbian regardless of what would happen to me.

My parents do not know or suspect that I am a lesbian. We are very conservative Baptists, and they would not stand for my being a lesbian at all. My older sister got pregnant when she was seventeen and they went wild! Who knows what they would do with me if they knew.

The only person in my family who knows is my older sister, and she has been wonderful about it. She first suspected about me when I was with my teacher, but I didn't tell her until after we had moved. (She has been very helpful. My teacher swore she would never send a letter to my house for my parents to accidentally find, so my sister receives my mail for me at her address.) I would never tell my parents - at least not before I graduate from college - because they are so religious.... There's no telling what they might do to me. I date guys occasionally, so they will not suspect anything. They don't want me to date much anyway, especially with what happened to my sister, so that keeps the pressure off.

Some of the other girls who were in lessons knew that I was attracted to my dance teacher. I think a couple of them were also attracted to her. After we became lovers, none of my friends knew what was going on. They were a little jealous that I was the teacher's pet, but they thought that was because I was a good dancer. The time we spent together was explained to them, and to my parents, as additional lessons. Dancing lessons, not love lessons!

Since I moved, my teacher and I talk occasionally on the phone, and we write each other. We are not lovers anymore; she has a lover she lives with now. But if we were together, and alone, I know I would want to go to bed with her. We are still very close, though not as close as we were before she moved in with her present lover.

Since my teacher, I have had three lovers including my present lover. The other two relationships occurred just before I was sixteen, and both lasted just a short time. My present lover and I have been together for almost a year. She is the daughter of a family that my parents are close to in church. She is fifteen and will be in ninth grade next year.

Both of the other relationships were with older women. I enjoyed the relationships but the other women didn't. I really liked them and thought they were very sexy and attractive. But both of them called me a "baby dyke," and couldn't handle having a relationship with me. I think they felt guilty, and felt they were making me do something I didn't want to do - which isn't true. My teacher never called me a baby dyke and never hesitated

about me being her lover, even though I was very young.

I guess the feelings I have about being a young lesbian come from being rejected by those two women. But I have also met adult lesbians who are not even interested in being a friend to me. Maybe they are afraid they'll be attracted to me and try to seduce me. Or that I will try to seduce them. Young women have enough problems trying to sort out their sexual feelings, and dealing with their parents and other people who don't like their being a lesbian without adult lesbians giving them hassles about being underage. I am disappointed in lesbians for not caring for us young lesbians. My lover and I are very happy, but we really would like to associate with older lesbians.

Confronting Ageism

Michael Alhonte

Although 18 at the time of writing this piece, Michael Alhonte had been involved with relationships with older men ranging from 31 to 49 since he came out as gay at the age of 15. He worked extensively with Gay Youth of New York and founded the organization PIGLUT (Politically Involved Gays and Lesbians Under Twenty-two). The following is one of a few essays written exclusively for the 1981 anthology The Age Taboo.

Most of what has recently been said and written about man/boy love has come from adults. Few think to ask young people whether this issue is important to them and, if so, what their thoughts about it are. This oversight is directly traceable to two things: the adults who feel the opinions of children would be worthless anyway (since they can't fully understand the implications of these relationships), and the children who normally would speak out but who instead have internalized the ageism of their adult neighbors and discredit their own thoughts and feelings. Unfortunately, adult supporters of man/boy love often neglect the very real problems confronting those who involve themselves in such relationships. Instead, they seem to concentrate on a boy's right to have sex, which often translates to their right to have sex with boys. This is an important issue to be sure, but is a moot point to those who are currently involved in these relationships. More important problems confront *these* people, and these are to be the focus of this article.

Even the most sincere and well-meaning boy-lover is often the victim of his own childhood when it comes to relating to boys. So many precepts about behavior "appropriate to age" are absorbed by a child while he grows, that when adulthood is reached, it is very difficult to escape from these psychological fetters. They lead to a great deal of unconscious oppression which is often so ingrained (as ageism usually is) that it is almost impossible to detect.

Domination

One of the chief manifestations of this oppression is the assumption that youth mandates passivity, primarily sexually but also in other matters. Many men might do well to take a good look at what happens in their relationships and then think back on who made these decisions. It is not that men deliberately ignore the likes or dislikes of the boys they date, but that children in general are so accustomed to being stepped on that if a suggestion is made by an adult it is often very difficult for the boy to admit to anything but agreement. Additionally, so many men look up sexual dominance as an expression of power that they would not allow themselves any other role. The idea that a teenage boy might enjoy something other than the "submissive" role is also foreign to many men. Of course, the opposite case is often true as well. A number of men seek a boy to dominate them. In my experience, however, it is very rare that one can find a man who is willing to be "switchable" - and in so doing, to totally divorce the age of the partners from the sexual acts they might enjoy.

There is also a great deal of stereotypical perception on both sides which can create friction. Boys are cast as either the young, ingenuous protégé or the streetwise, butch, jock punk. They are considered either utterly innocent or falsely cocky and self-assured. In either case they are possessed of remarkable stamina and sexual ferocity. Men, on the other hand, are considered stable, omniscient, and self-reliant. Unfortunately, the majority of

boys are not so easily categorized - and many end up modifying their personalities unconsciously to fit their lover's conceptions of them. Similarly, men are rarely as rock-hard and perfect as their starry-eyed boys imagine. And when people on either side digress from stereotypical programs it can lead to problems. This in itself is possibly the most irritating aspect of ageism. I have been courted by numerous men who believe that I will be utterly and completely charmed by financial solvency. To those who subscribe to this mode of thinking, anyone who can afford to buy me a drink is rightfully entitled to my body. This does not even entail his actually *buying* the drink. Still others automatically assume that I desire to be ravished by a strong, suave man. I will admit that the thought has flickered more than once through my mind, but I do not feel that way *all* the time. Additionally, strength and suavity are no always sufficient.

The other side of the coin concerns men who are embarrassed or even offended if I should happen to demonstrate an interest in them. These men *are* sexually attracted to me - but they feel that they, as older men, should make the first approach. Too many times I have heard the refrain, "But, my *God*, - you're so *young*!" They find me old enough to screw but not old enough to talk to.

Which leads to the problem of objectification. Too many men adore boys as abstract, sexual beings, but refuse (or are unable) to deal with them as people. If they *do* pretend to show interest in what a boy has to say after sex, it is usually in a patronising, superior manner; often it is punctuated with degrading estimations of the boy's sexual value - as if this were the only level on which a boy can be valuable - perhaps intended as sincere compliments but more likely to be the only statements the man can honestly make, since he has not bothered in the slightest to get to know something about the boy.

There is also the unique situation of a younger lover growing "too old." When I reached 18, I was seized by an irrational fear that since I was no longer "chicken" I could no longer attract older boy-lovers. At the same time I felt I was not old enough to appeal to other older men. I was worried that I would be in a sort of sexual limbo. I have since learned that this is hardly the case. The percentage of exclusive "boy"-lovers is quite low; additionally, many people were open to me now, who had not been when I was still a minor, merely because I *was* over 18 - though I looked and acted quite the same as when I was 17. My adulthood made a relationship seem more sensible to some people. And yet, I have been involved in relationships with people who did *not* want me any older than I was. I was embarrassed and irritated by the hairs sprouting on my face and chest because my lover was not attracted to hairy people. Of course it wasn't under *my* control; my body was simply completing its physical maturation. This problem was never resolved; we broke up shortly due to utterly unconnected influences. But how many couples *do* break up for that reason?

Economic Imbalance

Society has also set up a framework for the relationship which is quite difficult to overcome. The boy is often economically unequipped to contribute anything towards the costs of a date or other expenses. If a man and boy want to move in together the financial burden must fall primarily on the man. This produces an unpleasant imbalance within the relationship. The boy usually has parents to answer to - a situation which may have become too far removed for the man to understand. These things, and others like them, are compounded by an ageist refusal to adapt to the unique deficiencies of one another's positions.

These are some of the problems which ageism creates within a man/boy relationship. Confronting these things may not be easy but it is essential. Though a man may not want to give up the power that age can give him, he must make this sacrifice if he is truly interested in man/boy love and not only man/boy sex. By the same token, a boy may not want to accept the responsibilities attached to a true emotional relationship, but with these responsibilities will come a new closeness to the man he loves. Both parties must fully

analyze the expectations they have of their partners. Which of these expectations stems from the actual person's capabilities and which from an ageist stereotype?

A heavy emphasis is placed on youth by the American culture, and through a man/boy relationship both parties can enjoy some of youth's charms: the adult vicariously, and the younger person through being confronted with the adult lifestyle. But one must never allow the desire for youthfulness to obstruct the avenues for growth and self-expression in a relationship. To identify the factor that enchants a man with a boy as merely the boy's youth is to ageistically negate a whole range of positive traits that the boy has. Perhaps his youth is part of it, but it is dangerous to attempt to stagnate the metamorphosis of a boy into an adult merely to preserve one arbitrary factor. Change is, and always has been, an important component of a relationship. If you cannot grow with a person, what use is he?

The problems that ageism creates are not significantly different from the problems of any relationship, in that they all involve a failure to see a partner as he really is. Ageism is one of the most difficult oppressions around to conquer, and I hope this article will help some people to better understand and try to battle it. For if we young people cannot even find a refuge from it with our older lovers, where else is such to be found?

